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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000195

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: POLICE BRUTALLY DISRUPT PRAYER RALLY AND ARREST
KEY OPPOSITION LEADERS

REF: A. REF A: HARARE 130

[1](#)B. REF B: 2005 HARARE 1056

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Security forces on March 11 brutally suppressed a prayer rally planned by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign and arrested more than 100, including MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai and other key opposition leaders. Observers

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report that more than 1,000 police officers were deployed to the Harare suburb of Highfields, and in running battles with opposition youths, killed one MDC activist. Police have refused lawyers access to those detained, many of whom have reportedly been severely beaten, including Tsvangirai. Human rights lawyers launched an urgent court application to gain access to those detained at 14 police stations across Harare, but a High Court judge has delayed the case. MDC and civil society leaders are calling for continued marches and rallies to maintain pressure on the regime. Local observers have commented on the new tone of defiance and resistance as Zimbabweans fight back against the regime. End Summary.

Police Aggression Exposed in Highfield - Again

[1](#)2. (SBU) Only three weeks after police brutally cracked down on a MDC rally in Highfield (ref A), police once again turned the low-income suburb into a war zone to block a prayer rally

by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign) an umbrella grouping of civil society groups, lead by the Christian Alliance clergy (ref B). Although prayer rallies are specifically exempted by the GOZ-imposed ban on political rallies, observers report that more than 1,000 officers were deployed with water cannons, tear gas, and truncheons to block the rally. Riot police descended on the Save Zimbabwe Campaign leaders as they approached the fairgrounds and arrested them as well as a number of activists.

13. (SBU) Those arrested included MDC faction leaders Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara, and National Constitutional

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Assembly leader Lovemore Madhuku. Angered by the heavy-handed dismissal of the rally, including the arrests, opposition supporters in Highfield fought pitched battles with police throughout the day. Embassy observers in Highfields reported seeing many intersections littered with stones and bricks that demonstrators had hurled at the riot police. At least two trucks, one army and one police, were stoned and overturned by the demonstrators. Police at one shopping center shot and killed MDC activist Gift Tandare) a father of three) as he attempted to throw back a tear gas canister fired by police. Numerous others sustained injuries at the hands of the heavily-armed police.

Leaders Assaulted, Denied Legal Access

14. (SBU) The police have been guarded about the whereabouts and conditions of those arrested. However, information seeped out today about mistreatment in police custody. According to anti-Senate MDC officials, Tsvangirai was beaten unconscious and rushed to Parirenyatwa Hospital last night for treatment. He had a swollen eye and deep gashes on his

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head that required stitches. Other MDC leaders had suffered head injuries, one of them apparently almost lost an ear from the beatings. NCA leader Lovemore Madhuku was seen by lawyers with a cast on his arm, which was reportedly broken, and bandages around his head, after also being treated at Parirenyatwa. The Ambassador and British Ambassador Pocock accompanied a local lawyer who attempted unsuccessfully to gain access to Tsvangirai last night to bring him food and water. MDC officials reported today that the beatings apparently ended following this show of international interest.

15. (SBU) Arrestees, including Tsvangirai, Mutambara, and Madhuku are being detained without access to their lawyers at 14 police stations across Harare. Police at Machipisa station in Highfield assaulted Tsvangirai's attorney when he inquired if Tsvangirai was being detained there. Police brandishing guns chased Zimbabwean Lawyers for Human Rights (ZHLR) lawyers out of Harare Central Police Station last night as they attempted to locate arrestees. Today lawyers visited several police stations to determine the whereabouts and condition of those arrested, but the police have not released information. Several prominent MDC leaders, including Secretary General Tendai Biti, have still not been located and it is feared that they have been taken to the notorious Goromonzi police facility known as a center for torturing the regime's victims.

16. (SBU) ZHLR filed an urgent court application to secure access to lawyers for those detained. High Court Justice Chinembiri Bhunu, however, refused to hear the application until March 13 and gave no explanation for his decision. (Note. Under Zimbabwean law, arrestees must be brought to court with 48 hours of arrest unless police seek an extension of time. March 13 is when those arrested this past weekend would normally be brought before a judge. End Note.)

Next Steps, Calls To Maintain The Pressure

¶7. (SBU) On March 12, at a briefing for diplomats, MDC Vice-President Khupe claimed the government's intent was to close all democratic space and turn Zimbabwe into a police state. Khupe, the highest-ranking MDC officials still at liberty, vowed that the Highfield events were just the beginning of the struggle. She said demonstrations would continue, aimed at the capitulation of ZANU-PF. According to Khupe, there were demonstrations today in Mutare and over 100 demonstrators were taken into custody. (Comment. Information is still sketchy and we are attempting to learn more about events in Mutare.)

¶8. (C) At a separate press conference earlier on March 12, the leaders of the Save Zimbabwe Campaign not under arrest condemned the police crackdown and called on the Home Affairs Minister to release all of the political detainees. Many of those present also demanded continued action against the regime. Afterward, anti-Senate MDC advisor Jameson Timba told poloff that the opposition intended to mobilize its supporters around Tandare's death. Noting that the MDC now had another martyr, Timba said that the MDC planned to march at Tandare's funeral, which his family had been asked to postpone until Tsvangirai was released from prison, so that the opposition leader could attend.

Comment

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¶9. (C) Highfield has enormous symbolism in Zimbabwean politics. It was there in 1963 that ZANU-PF was formed and it was to Highfield that Robert Mugabe returned from exile in ¶1980. In recent years it has become an MDC bastion. In 2002, Tsvangirai addressed a presidential campaign rally in Highfield of more than 100,000 people. That a ZANU-PF government would in its turn suppress the people of the suburb and turn it into a war zone speaks volumes about the extent to which Robert Mugabe and his regime have betrayed the principles of liberation.

¶10. (C) The regime has lost the people of Highfield and with them the people of Zimbabwe. Its actions are the desperate attempts of a desperate regime to maintain its hold on power through naked repression. However, as is so often the case with this regime, it may prove its own worst enemy. The GOZ's heavy-handed tactics, resulting in death and serious injuries, appear to be galvanizing the anger of the people and the resolve of the opposition. Local observers have commented on the new tone of open defiance and a willingness to fight the police that is increasingly creeping into demonstrations.
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